



Fact Sheet

Information For Water Purveyors

Operating Permits for Drinking Water Systems

Background

Legislation passed in 1991 requires all Group A public water systems to get annual operating permits. A Group A water system is any water system which has 15 or more service connections or regularly serves 25 or more people 60 or more days per year.

The legislation had two major purposes:

1. Provide a compliance mechanism linked to annual performance evaluations of water systems.
2. Provide revenue to support administration of the state Drinking Water Program.

Requirements for Group A Water systems

Owners must get an operating permit each year. To do so, they must complete and return an annual fee statement along with the appropriate fee to the Department of Health before a specified time each year.

Fees range from \$25 to \$10,000 and are based on the number of “calculated equivalent services” a system has. Information for calculating this number comes from the department’s Water Facilities Inventory (WFI) data, which water systems update annually.

Schedule

The processing and issuance of operating permits is divided into quarters.

Quarter 1: Community systems with more than 500 services and satellite management agencies that own water systems. Fee statements mailed in January, permits issued around the last week in May to systems that have returned the signed statement and paid the fee.

Quarter 2: Community water systems with 500 or fewer services. Fee statements mailed in April, permits issued around the last week in August.

Quarter 3: Non-transient non-community (NTNC) and transient non-community (TNC) systems. Fee statements mailed in July, permits issued around the last week in November.

Quarter 4: Selected state and federal agency water systems. Fee statements mailed in October, permits issued around the last week in February.



HELPING TO ENSURE SAFE AND RELIABLE DRINKING WATER

Evaluation and compliance

The operating permits are intended as a compliance tool to help ensure that consumers have access to safe and reliable drinking water. They also provide a way for customers to know the status of their water system. To achieve this, categories were developed which identify a water system's general compliance status. During the quarterly process, water systems are evaluated for compliance with drinking water regulations and assigned a color category.

Green = Substantial compliance

Yellow = Conditional compliance

Red = Substantial noncompliance

Blue = Undetermined

A system categorized as "Red" is considered inadequate. This may result in denial of loans, building permits, on-site sewage disposal permits, food service permits, liquor licenses, and other permits or licenses for properties served by the system.

The Department of Health may attach conditions to the issuance of an operating permit, specifying compliance issues the water system owner must address. Examples include:

- Comply with a Departmental Order.
- Reduce the number of service connections or get approval to increase the number allowed.
- Obtain approval of construction documents.
- Hire a certified operator.
- Obtain approval of a water system plan.

For More Information

Washington State Department of Health:

Drinking Water Southwest Regional Office: 360-664-0768

Drinking Water Northwest Regional Office: 253-395-6750

Drinking Water Eastern Regional Office: 509-456-3115

General Information: 1-800-521-0323

Division of Drinking Water: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw>